

ASHTEAD COMMON CONSULTATIVE COMMITTEE
Tuesday, 27 January 2015

Minutes of the meeting of the Ashtead Common Consultative Committee held at
Committee Room 4 - 2nd Floor West Wing, Guildhall on Tuesday, 27 January 2015
at 11.30 am

Present

Members:

Alderman Gordon Haines (Chairman)
George Abrahams (Deputy Chairman)
Barbara Newman
Sylvia Moys
Douglas Mobsby
David Baker (Ashtead Residents' Association)
Bob Eberhard (CTC Local Rights of Way)
James Irvine (Volunteers Representative)
Paul Krause (Surrey Wildlife Trust)
Gary Nash (Surrey County Council Youth Worker)
Councillor John Northcott (Mole Valley District Council)

Officers:

David Arnold	Town Clerk's Department
Andy Barnard	Superintendent, Burnham Beeches, Stoke Common & City Commons
Andrew Thwaites	Head Ranger, Ashtead Common
Shaun Waddell	Senior Ranger, Ashtead Common

1. **APOLOGIES**

Apologies for absence were received from Joseph Byllam-Barnes, Conor Morrow (Lower Mole Countryside Management Project), Councillor Chris Townsend (Surrey County Council), and Pippa Woodall (British Horse Society).

2. **MEMBERS' DECLARATIONS UNDER THE CODE OF CONDUCT IN RESPECT OF ITEMS ON THE AGENDA**

There were none.

3. **MINUTES**

RESOLVED – That the public minutes of the last meeting held on 17 February 2014 be agreed.

Matters Arising

Site of Specific Scientific Interest (SSSI) Boundary

In response to a member's question, the Head Ranger for Ashtead Common advised that Natural England had been contacted regarding Wood Field and Craddocks Wood not being included within the SSSI boundary. He added that it

was a lengthy process to include these areas within the SSSI and there was a risk of other parts of the SSSI being excluded if standards were not met.

4. TERMS OF REFERENCE

The Committee received the approved Terms of Reference for the Ashtead Common Consultative Committee.

RESOLVED – That the approved Terms of Reference be noted.

5. UPDATE ON STRUCTURAL CHANGES

The Committee received a verbal report of the Superintendent regarding structural changes within the Open Spaces Department. He explained that Ashtead Common was the responsibility of the Burnham Beeches, Stoke and City Commons division within the City of London Corporation Open Spaces Directorate. He advised that he had been appointed as Superintendent of Burnham Beeches, Stoke and City Commons on a permanent basis in December 2014 and there had been a reduction of one Head Ranger post within the division to create a Support Services Manager post, which was currently being recruited.

The Chairman congratulated the Superintendent on his permanent appointment and thanked him for the excellent work carried out by his team so far.

Members were advised that the next steps following the structural changes included the development of the vision and strategic objectives for the Burnham Beeches, Stoke and City Commons division and to meet the financial challenge of the Service Based Review.

In response to a Member's question, the Superintendent advised that he had been working at least one day a week at each Commons' office. He added that his next objective was to spend more time out on the open spaces to gain a better understanding of each site.

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6. SERVICE BASED REVIEW

The Committee received a verbal report of the Superintendent regarding the Service Based Review. Members were informed that the Open Spaces Department was required to make savings of £2.189 million by 2017/18, which represented a 14% budget reduction. The Superintendent advised that £1.175 million of savings would be met through core areas such as third party provision of sports facilities and a review of the Department's facilities; £541,000 would be met through operational efficiencies such as improved vehicle fleet management; and £473,000 would be met through increased income generation by increasing car park charges, adding new charges and letting out surplus properties on the Commons. Members were assured that core activities such as nature conservation and recreation would continue to be delivered to a high standard whilst savings were delivered.

The Chairman added that the Superintendent had an excellent track record of being economical and imaginative with limited funds available from his experience at Burnham Beeches. He thanked members of the Consultative

Committee in advance for their support required during the financial challenge ahead.

In response to a member's question, the Head Ranger for Ashted Common advised that there was an existing close working relationship with the Borough of Epsom and Ewell and the possibility of a more strategic relationship to share resources and make savings would be explored.

Members noted that there could be opportunities for funding through the Heritage Lottery Fund or grants from the European Union (EU) for biodiversity projects. Collaboration with Surrey University or the Surrey Wildlife Trust during projects could help further reduce costs. The Superintendent added that the possibility of EU grants had been looked at previously but the application process was both lengthy and costly.

In response to a member's question regarding increased wayleave charges, the Head Ranger advised that full details of the changes would be circulated to volunteers later in year to ensure that neighbours to the Common received correct information.

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7. EPPING FOREST LEGISLATIVE CHANGES

The Committee received a verbal report of the Superintendent regarding changes to legislation governing the City of London Corporation's Open Spaces. He explained that each open space within the directorate was governed by specific Acts of Parliament from the 1870s, so decisions relating to spending had to be reflected in those Acts. Amendments had to be agreed by Parliament via Various Powers Acts, which had been used in the past for specific changes. He advised that there was now a need to amend and update the Acts more generally to incorporate the motor car, increasing financial challenges, population increase, and anti-social behaviour.

The Superintendent added that the following issues could be addressed with a Various Powers Act amendment:-

- surplus vacant accommodation on the Commons could be let to domestic or commercial private tenants instead of remaining vacant or being demolished;
- business and Commercial contracts could be no longer limited to three year periods;
- fines that were limited to specific amounts across the Open Spaces Directorate could be increased in line with the national scale of fines to better act as a deterrent against anti-social behaviour;
- members of the public could not be ejected from the site under the current legislation so new powers would enable staff to do this and to temporarily exclude the public from small areas to encourage income from the film industry;
- damage to verges caused by vehicles could be addressed via a legal framework within the Acts.

In response to a Member's question, the Superintendent advised that small areas of the sites would be reserved for filming for perhaps one week at a time and a local filming policy would be developed for each of the City Commons. The Superintendent also advised that each part of the Division may need its own local policy on such matters.

A member informed the Committee that the Tea Room building between Ashted Station and the Ashted Common offices were rumoured to be subject to a development proposal. Members noted that the City of London Corporation should object to the proposal if it came to fruition. Members suggested that there may be an opportunity to create a car park for the Common if the buildings were demolished and development of the site was necessary. However, members acknowledged that there was no existing need for a car park to the Common as it was primarily used by local people.

Members were advised that a Private Members' Bill would be presented to Parliament in November 2015. Members were further advised that the Superintendent would circulate his presentation and a summary document on the matter in the near future and that their feedback in relation to the above issues at Ashted Common would be welcome during the consultation process up to 15 April 2015 via the City Commons email address. A formal consultation process involving members of the public would then take place; details of which would be placed in literature at Ashted Common and on the Common's website.

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8. MANAGEMENT PRIORITIES FOR 2015/16

The Committee received a verbal update by the Head Ranger of Ashted Common regarding the management priorities for 2015/16. Members were advised of the following matters:

Grazing

The Head Ranger advised that a small grazing herd of five Sussex cattle would return to wood pasture and scrub grassland areas, whilst future options would be reviewed incrementally. In response to members' questions. He added that an invisible fence system had proved successful with cattle at Epping Forest but artificial insemination of females had not been as successful as it had been at Epping.

Tree Health

The Head Ranger advised that tree wardens and staff would regularly monitor for Oak Processionary Moth (OPM) and Ash Dieback. Members were advised that the threat of OPM was moving ever closer through West and South West London, so wardens had been trained to check for its effects.

In response to a member's question, the Head Ranger advised that there was no minimum time required by volunteer tree wardens so local Duke of Edinburgh students were able volunteer as much of their time as they could.

Management of Pollution at the Rye Brook

Members were advised that an oily substance had been polluting water at the Rye Brook. An improved response was required from the Environment Agency (EA) and Thames Water, whose responsibility it was to deal with the water quality. Volunteers had helped survey the diversity of fauna in the Brook, in partnership with the Lower Mole Project; they found that the water in the polluted area of the Rye Brook scored lowest on the Angler's Score Index (ASI), a measurement of species diversity in water. This suggested that the pollution had affected species diversity in the water but the second inspection showed a higher ASI score than the first, which was a positive improvement.

In response to a question from the Chairman, the Head Ranger advised that the EA had been getting Thames Water to conduct investigations into the source of the pollution. The Senior Ranger added that the work of Surrey Wildlife Trust volunteers had been extremely valuable in surveying for the effects of the pollution. The Chairman added his thanks to all volunteers for their excellent efforts across all areas of the Common.

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9. REVIEW OF ANNUAL WORK PROGRAMME 2014/15 AND PRESENTATION OF THE 2015/16 ANNUAL WORK PROGRAMME

The Committee received a verbal update from the Senior Ranger of Ashted Common that reviewed the 2014/15 annual work programme. Members were advised on the following matters:

Veteran Trees

The Senior Ranger advised that it had been year five of the Veteran Tree Schedule, with the cutting season due to finish at the end of February 2015. Members were advised that 96 Oak trees had been retrenched along with 138 halo released and 78 high halo released. The Senior Ranger added that this work had been carried out by a team of three contractors from KPS, who were currently on site. In response to members' questions, he advised that the retrenched veteran trees were given a 10 – 15% reduction of limbs to give a natural look. Members were advised that one or two veteran trees succumb to strong winds each year but they provided excellent deadwood habitat for wildlife.

Bracken Control

The Senior Ranger advised that bracken management was focussed on more than ever during 2014. Bracken would continue to be tractor mowed and hand pulled as part of a plan to develop more areas for wood pasture.

Volunteering

The Senior Ranger advised that Monday Estate Team of volunteers had made a significant contribution to the fabric and furniture of the Common in 2014, helping towards the application for a Green Flag Award. He added that higher level volunteer experiences had also been developed: a student volunteer from Merrist Wood College had worked for the tree team for 300 hours over a three month period.

In response to a member's question, the Head Ranger advised that there was not a waiting list for volunteers at present but a good level of interest remained; new volunteers were able to provide assistance in certain areas straight away. He added that volunteering did not take place at weekends but this could be facilitated for a large, established group of volunteers.

Ecological Monitoring

The Senior Ranger advised that ecological monitoring surveys on mammals, reptiles, birds, river flies, and the Great Crested Newt had been carried out by staff and volunteers. Future surveys on other notable species such as butterflies and moths would be carried out during 2015.

Access Improvements

Members were advised that Bridleway 38 would be re-profiled after the successful re-surfacing of Bridleway 29 in 2014. Members noted that Bridleway 38 was currently waterlogged at the point immediately north of Lady Howards Crossing points so the Senior Ranger advised 460 yards would be re-profiled, including the problem areas.

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10. **QUESTIONS ON MATTER RELATING TO WORK OF THE COMMITTEE**

There were none.

11. **ANY OTHER BUSINESS THAT THE CHAIRMAN CONSIDERS URGENT**

There was none.

12. **DATE OF NEXT MEETING**

It was agreed that the Town Clerk would circulate a date for the summer visit after consultation with the Chairman, Superintendent and Head Ranger.

The meeting ended at 1.10 pm

Chairman

**Contact Officer: David Arnold
David.Arnold@cityoflondon.gov.uk
020 7332 1174**